

[Western stories tall and not so tall]

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Project worker Frank Heiner

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Stories

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Frank Heiner III. 1937-38

Dear Mr. Frederick:

I am sending in a contribution to the folk lore assignment as you requested in your recent communication.

The stories I am giving here were told to me at various times. None of them, so far as I know, are anywhere recorded though of course, most of them fall into definite folk lore patterns. The only alterations I have made from the original narratives consist in changing names or circumstances of narration, or adding details of local color, or in giving the narrator a tongue. None of the main incidents have been invented.

A. Western stories tall and not so tall.

1. A strange diet.

"Yes," said the old Captain, "I went west right after the war, in 1867 to be exact. Those were great old days. I went up the Missouri river to Fort Benton Montana. The blackfeet Indians were out in full force at that time. Old Chief Raven Claw had two thousand warriors at his back. Then, there were the mining camps, everything wide open day and night. We

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all had money and we all blew it in as soon as we got it. I remember when I made fourteen dollars a day workin in the drift and I would'nt have enough to pay my board bill at the end of the week. Expenses were high but I lost most of it buckin the tiger, that is, farobank. The saloons were full all the time. There were shootin scrapes every day but that did'nt make no difference in the population. There were always new people in town, cattle men, miners, road agents. I remember seeing five road agents hung one day. They'd just put 'em up on a 2 W3693 pile of barrels, tied a rope arround their necks, and kick the barrels from under them. When one of them named George Ives had gone up and started to wiggle like a fish out of water, one of his pals named Boon Hellem looked at him and says, "Cheer up Partner, I'll be in Hell with you in afew minutes." Yes' , you'd run up against some strange characters out there in those days."

Always eager to play the roll of foil with leading questions when there is the chance of a yarn, I said, "Captain, who in the strangest character you remember at that time?" The old man reflected and said "Just about the strangest was Liver Eatin Johnson. There was nothin against the man. He was a good fellow just kind of inhuman like. He was a great big powerful fellow, a regular giant. Most of the time, he kept to himself and did'nt have a word to say to anyone but sometimes, be would come into town and drink and when Liver Eatin got a couple of quarts under his belt, he was apt to get a little noisy. He was good natured but noisy and what's more, he was so big that he was likely to break anything that got in his way, glass or furniture or ordinary people, without even meanin to do it. One night when he had one of his jags on, the town Marshall came up to him and told him that he was under arrest. The Marshall came about up to his elbow and Johnson could have put him over his knee and sparked him. We all thought something like that or worse, would happen. At least the Marshall might have had sense enough to draw a gun first and get the drop on his man. But he did'nt. He and Liver Eatin were pretty good friends and Liver Eatin just went along with him as meek as a lamb.

Now, the jail was a board shanty that didn't amount to anything. It was scarcely ever used. The Marshall told his prisoner that he could just sleep off his drunk and pay a fine next morning.

3

But Liver Eatin Johnson wasn't that kind of a man. As soon as the Marshall was gone, he just put his back against the wall of that shanty and down it came. He kicked aside the rubbish and simply walked out of town to his own cabin to sleep off his jag. Nobody ever asked him to pay a fine or even to help rebuild the jail.

But the story I was gone to tell you is how Liver Eatin Johnson got his name. He was out trappin one time and he run out of food. Then, the Indians attacked. He was a good shot and when he killed seven of the bastards, they they decided to let him alone. Now, he was mighty hungry. He had'nt eaten for a day or so. The way Liver Eatin told it afterward was, "I looks over them Indians and thinks I, there might be good meat on some of them. I picked out the younte youngest for I figured that be was likely to be the tenderest. I didn't want all of him. Which part should I choose? I could cut me a nice steak if I wanted but no, thinks I, the choicest part will be the liver. There's nothin I like better than nice tender liver. And let me tell you, boys, I never had a choicer meal in all my days than the liver ofn that young Indian."

I don't know whether Liver Eatin Johnson was naturally a canibal or whether things just came out that way. But one time, later, he was out trappin with another man. Food was scarce as the time before and again, the Indians attacked. This time, Johnson's partner was killed but there were no dead Indians left arround. Johnson knew that he could get back to the fort in a couple of days and there was a lot of extra meat on his partner that wouldn't be any good to a dead man. So he just cut off a leg from his dead partner and hung it over his saddle horn and went on his way. He took some meat off whenever he needed it and the leg was half eaten when he got to the fort. Out comes a young officer

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fresh from the states in his 4 bright new uniform and says he, "What have you got there on your saddle horn, Johnson?" And Johnson answers him, "The ham of a man."

Then, the old timers around the fort came out and gathered up the young [dude?] officer who had fainted and asked Johnson how it happened."

2, It was cold just then.

Mr. X. was definitely of the old west. His type was authentic and the picture would be incomplete and less interesting without it. He was a bit of a prospector and a good deal more of a promoter. The old Captain said Mr. X. had done all his prospecting from a Pullman car window. Be that as it may, Mr. X. was a genial liar. He had on tap a large enough supply of imagination and other people's experience which he always told as his own to make up for the time he had spent in the smoking car rather than the wilderness. Sometimes he expected to be believed and sometimes, it was pure stretching the story to get a laugh. No one believed him in either case, so it didn't matter.

"Sure, I've been in Alaska," said Mr. X. one day when the conversation got around to that subject. I was there just before the gold rush or just after, I don't remember which but it wasn't 1898. I spent the winter there. Ye Gods, was it cold? When you went out, your breath would freeze on you so you could melt it down for ice-water. When your breath froze, you had to knock it off. If enough of it accumulated, it would fall and crush your toes.

There were five or six of us that lived up in a cabin. We had gone up into the mountains to prospect but the winter caught us.

5

There was nothing for us to do but to lay up until Spring. We had plenty of supplies and it wouldn't have been so bad if it weren't for the cold. It was cold enough to [?] freeze your hair off.

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Well, there was a young fellow with us named Jimmy and he w was'nt so strong. His family never should have let him come to a country like that. The rest of the party were hard and tough like me, you know, the kind that can eat rocks and ask why the Hell they make the boulders so soft nowadays. I felt sorry for Jimmy. I didn't think he could get through that Alaskan winter and he did'nt. Poor Jimmy died. At last, the cold got him.

Well now, we had a dead man on our hands and the question was what to do with him. We broke about a half dozen picks on the ground trying to dig a grave for Jimmy. We didn't have any dynamite and if we had, the ground was frozen so hard we couldn't have blasted a hole big enough for a grave anyway. Finally, I had a bright idea. It makes it hard sometimes to be the kind of man I am. When the rest throw up their hands, I just take everything over and get them out of their scrape. They just say, "Leave it to X. He knows what to do. He'll get us out of this and do I come through? You bet."

As I was saying, I had a bright idea. I called one of the other boys to help me carry Jimmy out of the cabin and we stood him up against the wall outside. I could see the boys look at each other and I knew they wondered what I had in mind. They didn't ask me though for they knew that if I made up my mind to do a thing, it would turn out alright.

I let Jimmy stand out there all night and when we went out to look at him next morning, there he stood frozen as solid as cement. Then, I went and got a pile-driver that we had arround the camp. We moved Jimmy away from the wall. We brought the pile-driver down on 6 his head several times and there he was, fixed there in the frozen ground, standing upright and looking as natural as life. I wouldn't be surprised if he's there still.

A Great Unappreciated Builder.

Dolan was a man past the middle age but he was not of the old west. He was of the new west, a modern hobo. When I knew him, he was one of the janitors in a medical school

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where I happened to be parking as a student at the time. Dolan [?] had had a variety of occupations.

“Sure, I've been a [?] timber beast up in the North West,” he would say to me. “And I was a [?] too. A lot of us used to carry the red card.”

“Say, Dolan, Pete doesn't think much of your way of life,” I said to him once. Pete was a young Polish janitor, dreamy, idealistic and religious. Pete enjoyed thinking of love, domestic bliss, and a home of his own with birds and running brooks and all [?] the trimmings.

“Is that so,” said Dolan. “Yes,” I continued. “Pete says he wants to marry and settle down and live on a farm.”

“I know,” Dolan answered [?] contemptuously. “He's the kind of guy that will save for forty years to buy twenty acres”

“If these hoosiers would travel ten miles, they might learn something,” Dolan would say. His use of the term Hoosier did not signify any particular hostility to the people of Indiana. He used it to mean hick. He was friendly with the students but he regarded most of them as naive and resented their tendency to patronize him.

One morning, a student said, “I suppose, Dolan that you have 7 traveled quite a little.”

“Jah,” Dolan answered curtly.

“Have you ever been in Colorado,” Again, “Jah.”

“Did you see Pike's Peak?”

Dolan flashed back, “Pike's Peak. I built it. And then, when the news got around that I had built Pike's Peak and what a good job it was, they sent for me to come to California, to

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come and build Yosemite Valley for them. I refused go at first but finally, when they coaxed me, I went out there. I finished Yosemite Valley in three days and when I had it all done, they said, "Throw him out, the god damned bum. He's no good anyway." the god damned bum."

B. Where Worlds Meet.

It is a truism that in this gorgeous fantastic aggregate we call America, the customs and traditions of older worlds meet and mingle with new conditions and a new life. As an extension of this fact, it frequently happens in the world of railroads and factories and mushroom cities, there is an echo of that spirit world, born of pre-scientific thinking and primitive imagining, the reflex of a primitive society.

8

Ghost Story

1. "Thou shalt not let a witch live."

This story was told me by an elderly Negro woman from the south. I should say, the two following stories were told me by her. She was interested in ghostly yarns. She was not an educated woman but she was far less superstitious than many people who have more advantages. We cannot too strongly insist that superstition is a cultural and not a racial phenomenon. In fact, with such people as the Negroes or the Irish, who have a rich tradition of supernaturalism, the reaction is apt to be violent and pronounced in the reverse, when they find that their beliefs are myths. The sensationalism of Mr. Paul Maurand [?] about atavisms of the Negro blood calling them back to the dark ancestral jungle worship is misleading and [?] Pernicious.

My narrator said, "There are a lot of old tales down in the south where I came from. I don't know whether there's any truth in them or not. I remember one story that the old folk used to tell us. It was about a miller that married a woman and after he was married a while,

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he began to hear strange stories about his wife. Some folks said she was a witch. One evening when he came home late, he came into the house and called his wife but there was no answer.

Then, a cat ran into the house and past him and into the room where he and his wife slept. Just then, his wife came out of the room and said, "Here I am dear. Did you call me?" He was sure she was'nt there before and the cat was'nt anywhere arround but he he just never let on he noticed anything. After a while, his wife said to him, "When you came in, a cat ran in here and he ran right through the house and right into the bedroom and jumped right out of the window. Did you see him?" The husband just put her off and 9 let on like it was nothin to him.

The next night, he pretended like he was real tired and wanted to go to bed early. He pretended to go to sleep right away but all the time, watched his wife to see what she would do.

As soon as she thought it was all safe, she slid out of her skin and changed herself to a cat and was out of the window and away. And she just left her skin layin there on the bed. The miller knew then that his wife was a witch.

He got up then and got some pepper and spilled it all over his wife's skin and the skin shrunk all up. Pretty soon, she came back and changed back to a woman again and tried to get into her skin but no matter how she tried, it would'nt fit her.

She cried out, "skinny, skinny, don't you know me?" But that did'nt do any good either and finally, she just ran off without any skin and nobody ever [?] saw her or heard of her again."

2. Some Queer Zoology.

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"There was another story that I used to hear," continued the Negro woman. "Down in our part of the country, there was an old woman that everybody called Aunt Liza and people were afraid of her because we all knew she was a witch.

One time, she and her husband that we called Uncle John, had some sort of argument with a white man they'd done some work for. Now, this white man owned a big farm and all of a sudden, the [?] funniest animals began to be born on his farm. There were sheep with feathers and chickens with wool. There were calves with pigs' snouts and pigs with horns. 10 Of course, the farmer knew right away that it was Aunt Liza done all that mischief. So one day when he saw Uncle John go by, he stopped him and said? "You tell Aunt Liza that if she don't take the spell off of them animals of mine, I'm gone to get a silver bullet and kill her with it."

Aunt Liza got afraid of him and didn't give him no more trouble.

Note.

The idea of the silver bullet or the bullet blessed by a priest or bishop having [speis?] special potency against witches or those with charmed lives, occurs in the folklore of nearly every European country. Maupassant uses it in one of his stories. Robert Chambers made good use of it in a short story, The Messenger of Death. The silver bullet or the blessed bullet is the one sure shot when hunting the wehr wolf if you should care for that sport. It was said of James Graham of Claverhouse, Viscount of Dundee, that he was killed by a silver bullet. One version makes it a crooked sixpence fired from the gun of a Cameronian.

For these reasons, it was of special interest to me to find the silver bullet as a factor in the story of the southern Negro woman who had consulted none of these authorities.

Father Antonio's White Hair.

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Where old beliefs are most likely to persist on American soil is among highly organized religious and national groups. It would follow that there would be an abundance of them among the Catholic population. This is particularly true of the Irish but the Germans, Poles and Italians have a good store.

The incident I am about to tell occurred [?] among the Italians 11 and the Italian priest who is the central character is so widely known that if I were to mention his name, he would be immediately recognized by many who knew him during his lifetime. The story was told to me by an old resident of Chicago.

Father Antonio was a kindly priest, beloved by all the people of his parish on the north side of Chicago and by a great many other people who were not of his flock. Father Antonio thought of everyone he knew as his parishoners, even Beppo, who did not know he was in anyone's parish, even Beppo whom nobody spoke to and whom they all spoke of in hushed voices.

Father Antonio had a snow white hair and the strange thing was that his hair had been white as long as most of us could remember.

Early on the evening when these things happened, the priest heard that Beppo was dying. No one sent for him as Beppo had no friends. He heard it casually remarked by some of the young people. It may have been Maria or Pasquale. He could not remember correctly afterwards just who it was that told him.

There were many Beppos in his parish but ah, this particular Beppo. It made one shudder to think of him and yet, he was a human soul that belonged to God and that and that God loved. Most of the people of the parish were simple, hard-working people. They loved their children and they loved the sun and wine and dancing. They lost their tempers sometimes but they meant no harm. Beppo was different. In the old country, he had been an assassin and had only left for the new world when his native land 12 became too hot to hold him.

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In Chicago, he was implicated in several robberies but his cunning got him out of trouble. Then, finally, a young girl was found with her skull crushed. She had been ravished and murdered with the utmost cruelty. Beppo had been seen in the vicinity. One woman avered that she had seen blood on his clothes. He was arrested and grilled but nothing could be proven against him and he had to be released.

The people of the parish talked together in little groups and determined to kill Beppo. He suddenly disappeared and was gone for years. That was before Father Antonio had come to the parish though he knew the story.

Then, Beppo returned as suddenly as he had disappeared. He lived alone and went about without a word to anyone. The priest would not have avoided him but the opportunity of becoming acquainted never presented itself. And now, this Beppo was dying.

Father Antonio entered a dirty hovel and found a mortally sick man. The man was delirious and did not know that anyone was near him. There was nothing for the priest to do but wait, in the hope that the dying man would regain consciousness for a space long enough to receive the last rites. ?

As he waited alone with the dying man, Father Antonio prayed. He implored God to grant him that one favor, that Beppo would regain consciousness. He thought of the thief upon the cross who had repented. Often and often, the last moment brought salvation. It was a torment to Father Antonio to think that any soul must be eternally damned. It pained him to think even of Iscariot in Hell.

13

God's mercy was easy to understand. God's justice must be taken for granted. There were some things one could not dwell on.

Library of Congress

Such was the fervor of his devotion that Father Antonio did not notice the hours slide by. Finally, he heard a stirring among the filthy rags which Beppo used for a bed. The dying man was looking at him, breathing hard but fully conscious.

"Hello," said Beppo weakly, "You are a priest. I stabbed one once.

"Tell me all about it, my son," said Father Antonio.

"Who sent you," Beppo asked.

"No one. I heard you were sick and I came."

"That is good of you."

"It is my duty and I am glad to be here." Beppo did not answer.

"Beppo, you are dying," said the priest softly but insistently.

"I know it," said Beppo. The priest continued, "now, you must tell me your sins and be sorry for them. We are all sinners and God is ready to forgive any of us if we will just repent and take his gift of salvation."

"Yes, I will. Please save me, Father," said Beppo.

Then, Beppo poured out such a story of crime and degradation as the priest had never heard before and never heard again. Beppo talked until he was not able to talk any more and lay back exhausted.

At that moment, Father Antonio became aware that they were no longer alone. There was something, someone else, in the room. It was a presence, a person. He saw it, he felt it. Yet, he never could describe exactly what it was. It was so many things at once.

It was the blood on the murderer's knife, the choking gasp from the gallows, the mad man's shriek of terror.

He not only saw it but the thing oozed into him and mingled with his spirit. He was Beppo and there was just enough of himself left to feel the shame and horror of it all. It was he who had slipped up behind people and cut their throats and felt the blood on his fingers. It was he who had laughed at the scream of pain from the old man as they burned his hands and feet with the torch to make him tell where the mone money was. It was his nails that had torn at the dying woman's flesh.

But somewhere, oh, somewhere, there was a priest. Somewhere, someone had died to save him, Beppo, Antonio. It was crushing him to the floor. He was losing, fainting. He must speak, "Christ, [redeemer?] of us all. Holy Mother of God."

The air cleared. It was gone. Father Antonio looked about him. It was not like awakening from a sleep. What was it? Had that lasted a minute or hours? The early light of morning streamed in through the broken window. He was shaken but how good to breathe the free air again. He bent over Beppo who obviously had but a very few minutes to live.

"My child, you are forgiven," he said. "Ask God to have mercy on you. Do you hear me?"

"Have mercy," the dying man mumbled mechanically.

The sun was well up by now. People were beginning to move about in the streets. Father happened to glance at a battered mirror on the table. He was astonished to see that his hair had become snow white.

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"Do I believe in fairies?" the elderly Irish woman answered. "I wouldn't say that I believe in them but many's the person in the old country that will tell you they saw them. Myself never saw them but when I was young, I did hear the cry of the Banshee and the whole village heard it.

There don't be many of those things in this country, you understand. Just the same, strange things happen to some people.

For years, before we moved to Chicago, we lived in a little town in Illinois not so far from here. There was an old woman that lived there named Mary Dugan. She was as funny as Dick's hat band and people said a lot of things about her but you know how they'll talk in a little place. I always let it go in one ear and out the other. There was no harm in the poor old creature. She had no one related to her except one son that lived in some city, I can't think now just where. The only person she used to go to visit very often was another old woman about her own age named Mrs. Mulvaney and the two of them were great old cronies. One day, Mrs. Dugan comes over to see Mrs. Mulvaney and asks her would she come over and help her find her son. "Find your son. In God's name, woman, have you taken leave of your senses."

Mrs. Dugan told her that, that morning, as she was upstairs doin her works, she heard her son's voice on the lower floor calling her, "Ma, I'm home. Come and get me something to eat." When she went downstairs, there was nobody there but the voice still called her 16 from room to room. By the time she told her story, Mrs. Mulvaney was excited and ready to go with her. The two of them searched the house from garret to celler and not a sign of any one but they both heard the voice calling and calling. Next day came a telegram that the son had been killed.

Well, that just about broke Mary Dugan and there was no consoleing her at all. Every day, she would walk to a spot a little way out of the town where there was a low fence at the edge of a field and the poor thing would sit there for hours and hours, God help her.

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Sometimes, her old friend Mrs. Mulvaney would go out there and sit beside her and talk to her.

Then, all of a sudden, Mary Dugan disappeared. Not a soul knew what became of her. She could'nt have gone away. There was no place for her to go. They searched the country arround for her but they could'nt find hide nor hair of her.

Then, one day, if you can believe Mrs. Mulvaney and she swore that it was the God's truth, she walked out to the fence near the field where the two of them used to sit. She sat down there just thinkin when all at once, she heard a noise and what should she see but Mary Dugan in the midst of the Good People, surrounded with a cloud of them. They were different sizes, she said, but most of them were little bits of things, knee high to a grasshopper. And they were singin and dancin arround and some of them had musical instruments.

Mary Dugan had a broad smile on her face and seemed to be happy. She waved to Mrs. Mulvaney but when Mrs. Mulvaney tried to speak 17 to her, the Little People whisked her away.

So that's how Mary Dugan was taken by the fairies and if you don't believe it, all I can say is, "Ask me no questions and I'll tell you no lies."²

The Signal of Doom.

Among the Anglo-Saxon people, save in certain definite sections, we do not find the organized patterns of beliefs which are present among some of the other groups. Rapid urbanization has destroyed them. Nevertheless, there is a rich tradition of ghost stories and experiences with the supernatural which when [?] people can be gotten to talk, is richly, richly rewarding. I am convinced that there is no block in this city and scarcely a family which has not some such memory. The following story was told me by a friend of an old New England family.

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"My mother went one time to the house of a friend whose father was ill and apparently dying. Mrs. W. was a young married woman like my mother but had had less experience in care of the sick and household responsibilities.

As it grew late in the evening, the question of sleeping quarters had to be considered. Mr. and Mrs. W. were keeping house on rather a small scale and had not provided for emergencies. Mrs. W. suggested that there was a bed stored in the basement and that if her husband and brother who were there, could bring it up, it would solve the situation.

The two men went down into the basement to bring up the bed. My mother remained in the kitchen. Mrs. W. went to her father's room to see if the sick man needed anything.

18

Suddenly, there was a terrible crash that shook the house. My mother rushed to the basement door. The men must have fallen with the bed they were bringing up. Some one must be hurt, perhaps killed.

No, the men were carrying the bed up the basement stairs and nothing had happened there. My mother turned to see Mrs. W. enter the kitchen, white but calm.

"I can't tell you what that noise was," said Mrs W." I don't know but I do know that my father will die tonight."

In answer to my mother's unexpressed question, Mrs. W. explained, "every time a member of my family is about to die, this sound occurs. It always comes a few hours before death. It has been so for generations. None of us know when it started. Of one thing, though, we are certain. If, at the moment, we are all in perfect health and we hear that sound, for one of us, it is a signal of doom."

You Can Have the House for Nothing.

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This story was told by a traveling salesman who swears by its authenticity which is the least valuable point in connection with it.

"Yes sir, this story is true and you can bet your last dollar on it and your boots and your pants and everything else you've got and then go out and borrow money from your friends. If you don't believe me, all you have to do is to send a telegram out there, to the Chamber of Commerce out there and they'll give you all the information. You can have the house for nothing. It won't cost you a cent, a house worth two hundred thousand dollars, I'm telling you, 19 two hundred thousand dollars. How would you like to have a house worth two hundred thousand dollars right outside of Los Angeles without having to pay for it? It looks easy doesn't it? Well as so often happens, it isn't as easy as it looks. I'll tell you how it works out.

A few years ago, the richest man in this little town was an old fellow named Joe Gyles. He had made a fortune on a lot of property he owned and he was so tight he squeaked. As he got up in years [?] though, he decided to let loose of some of his cash. He thought he'd kind of spread himself and become a real citizen. He built himself a house just outside of the town and spared no expense in building it. Say, talk about your mansions. He certainly did a good job while he was at it and it cost him two hundred thousand dollars.

Well, he lived in his new joint there alone for some time but the idea must have occurred to him that there wasn't much use being the owner of such a swell place with no one to come and a[?] admire it. Mr. Gyles was about as well liked by his neighbors as smallpox.

The solution was to marry. People would come to his new house if he had a wife there to entertain. What's more, the people around there say that as old as he was, he still felt his oats.

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He was too bashful to court any woman of the place. That is to say, he was such a disagreeable old skunk that with all his money, no girl would want to hang herself by marrying him. He usually got what he wanted though and he knew the answer to that one.

There was a widow and her daughter that lived in the town. 20 You might have thought he'd have picked the widow. Not on your life. He went for the daughter like a hungry pooch after meat. To make it perfect, he had a mortgage on the widow's home just like in the movies. He didn't waste any time in courtship. He knew he was no Romeo and so he just talked talked cold turkey to them. "You come across or out you go."

It started that way like the movies or books but in the movies or books, there would have been some handsome young punk that would have come to the rescue and the villain would have been foiled. This didn't happen. The mother was kind of unscrupulous and the girl gave in. The marriage took place and Joe Gyles took his bride up to his swell new two hundred thousand dollar honeymoon cottage.

Now, either the place or her loving husband must have gotten on the bride's nerves because three days after the wedding, she cut the old man's throat and came down and gave herself up to the police. She made a good job of it too, they say. She just hacked his neck from ear to ear.

Now get me carefully right here. This girl was under guard in the jail and no one was allowed to come near her. She had been searched so that she didn't have any weapon on her. But the very next morning after she surrendered, she was found in her cell with her throat cut in exactly the same way she had done to her husband. Now, account for that, will you? The authorities couldn't.

After that, nobody could live in the mansion. It was haunted and believe you me, old Joe Gyles was a tough ghost. He just drove people out as soon as they moved in there. It seemed a shame to 21 let a fine house like that go to ruin. It was impossible to find a

Library of Congress

buyer. Finally, the Chamber of Commerce offered it free to anyone who would spend one night in the place and that offer holds good today.

Soon after the place was offered that way, a an old couple from Arkansas wanted to try the place. They just brought in a mattress and some provisions and camped there. They had been farmers and the work in the fields had bent their backs so that they had some kind of curvature and could'nt stand up straight.

Well, old Joe gave them the works. They had a hard [?] time getting out of there and when they did, they ran so fast that it straightened out their backs.

Then, someone had the bright idea of calling in a Spiritualist medium. They thought that if they could get some one that knew the spirits well enough to call them by their first names, they could kind of talk it over with old Joe and make him be reasonable.

They got a medium alright, a woman who said that making deals with spirits was right in her line and she agreed to spend the night in the haunted house for a real business conference with Joe. That spook was in no mood for business. According to the story she told, she had to fight for her virtue. She said that he was the obscenest spirit she ever met.

Well, I can't guarantee any of the things that happened before I got into it but what I saw I'll swear to on a stack of bibles and that's all there is to it. Shorty and Sam and I were laying up in that place getting some customers and waiting for orders from our firms when we heard this story

We could hardly believe it but when it was told to us by 22 responsible business men of the town, we could hardly doubt it.

"Fellas, I'll tell you one thing," Shorty said, "And that is that I intend to spend a night in that house and if there's a whole army of ghosts there, they won't put me out."

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Sam said, "Me too," and I made the vote unanimous.

We told the crowd down at the saloon what our intention was and they were all interest and ready to cooperate in any way they could. The proprietor had a big lunch of fried chicken packed for us and we took some wet goods to fortify us, a little Dutch courage, you know, and went on up to the haunted house.

We just sat down in the front room with nobody on the premises to disturb us and made ourselves at home. "I wonder where old Joe spends his time when he isn't here on haunting duty," Shorty suggests.

"Oh, I don't know," says Sam. "He probably just sits arround and chews the rag in the spirit world."

"Maybe, he puts in time practicing on the harp," I venture.

Shorty says, "From all we hear, it's more likely that he practices the art of the shovel."

"Let's not speak disrespectful of the dead," Sam warns. "For all you know, he may be standing right here among us getting an ear full."

That was'nt so good. It made me feel creepy but I would'nt be kidded. "Sam, he's probably right behind your chair," I said.

"Shut up," says Sam and I noticed that he moved his chair a minute later. Well we spent most of the evening talking about what we'd do with the money we got on the house when we sold it.

Everything was nice and comfortable. The people at the saloon had told us that the ghost generally shows up at twelve and though that was closing time by law, they said they would keep the place 23 open for us for a while as they knew we would be needing drinks.

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It finally got around toward midnight. At just five minutes to twelve, the door went shut with a bang. The important point about that was that it was a still night, not a breath of wind stirring anywhere. We all sat tight in our chairs, not saying a word.

Two minutes passed like two hours. At just three minutes to twelve, I know because I was watching the clock, the lantern went out with a puff.

We all stood up spontaneous like, not one of us saying anything.

Two more minutes passed. Then, one minute to twelve, out goes the fire, all at once just as you would blow out a match, a heap of dead ashes, I never saw anything like it. I can tell you, my breathing was anything but regular.

That next minute was the toughest I ever spent.

Then, before the clock finished striking twelve, there was a tall old man standing in front of us just as if he had been there all the time.

He was all in white and in the front of his neck was a big, raw, gaping wound. It hung open and looked the size of a cow's mouth.

He walked slowly toward us and as he got about up to us he stuck his great big, long tongue out through the wound. We broke and ran. We got to that saloon three quarters of a mile away in five minutes. Yes sir, we were there at five minutes after twelve.

That's the last I ever saw of Joe Gyles or his house but I hear from people out there that it is still unoccupied and the 24 offer still holds good. If you're game enough, you can have the house for nothing.

By way of comment.

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Though I have omitted a good many stories from this report which might be of equal interest to any I have given, I selected the above anecdotes as types which I thought may have some value for a compilation on American folklore. If more material is wanted, I could send in other contributions.

Yours Sincerely,

F. G. Heiner.